

KINSHIP

41

only five children living, and the largest polygynous household 592 had only four, but many children had died in infancy.

The attitudes within the household are much like those found 593 universally between members of the same 'family'. Children respect and love both parents. Perhaps there is a little more respect for the father and a little more love for the mother, but this distinction is not carried to the extent which seems to be the case in more strongly patrilineal societies. The respect which a child has for his parents is plainly shown in his refusal under ordinary circumstances to speak their names. 'Even a child on being asked to tell the name of his father or his mother, will reply saying, "Tate (my father) indeed is his name." And if one asks again, saying, "Your mother, what is her name?" the child will reply saying, "Mai (my mother) indeed is her name."' 1 The sex 857 division of Umbundu life begins within the household when very early in life the boys begin to be trained by their elder brothers, fathers, and other male relatives, while the girls remain or go about with their mothers, elder sisters, and other female relatives. Only the very small boys and girls (say under six or eight) play together. The age distinctions of Umbundu society are learned with the child's first attempts at language. Either his elder brother or sister he calls *huvange*, and he soon learns that the brother or sister younger than himself is *manjange*. Brothers and sisters, siblings or children of the same parents, are replicas of one another in social relationship, and . . . socially identical² for practical purposes. Among Ovimbundu the principal differences are due to the two factors of age and sex. The influence of age is funda- 593 mental and is easily demonstrated by the fact that there is no word 561 for 'brother' but instead for 'elder brother' or 'younger brother'. Within the household the factor of sex is ever present, but there is not the invidious distinction found among some of the more strongly patrilineal societies such as the Zulu² which reserves the more respectful term for the brother. Umbundu applies the terms *huva* and *manja*³ to brothers and sisters without distinction of sex. There are the additional terms *kota* (elder brother), *mbuale* (sister), and the reciprocal terms *mune* (brother, spoken

¹ R. Kavita Evambi, from an Umbundu manuscript.

² E. J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (London: Longmans, 1936), p. 24.

³ These are the root terms without the possessive suffixes.

94.

UMBUNDU KINSHIP AND CHARACTER

861

[538]

Oku longa ku yevi, tumōlā hē?

Teaching you do not hear, are you child?

One who fails properly to absorb both mush and teaching can hardly be a proper human being. The implication of the question is that if he is not a child he may be some unearthly creature. There may be a similar implication in this other proverb which may also be used on similar occasions:

Ku ka. ñavise ame konjembo si endi love.

Do not tire me I to hades shall not go with you.

U lonjila yaye, u lonjila yaye.

Each with path his (own), each with path his (own).

With the aid of elder sister mother usually wins out. Picking up her hoe and basket she gives the children their injunctions for the day. 'Stay then and I'll come right back, but don't play with the neighbour's chickens, don't beat each other, don't play with bows lest you put out the eye of another, and don't steal from the cooking pot, there now!'

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461

With children of all ages left alone in the village, these injunctions are a minimum of necessity. The mother might also go on to detail the consequences of disobedience, how one who put out another's eye would be sold into slavery, nor was the mother exaggerating. If the Ovimbundu punish their children with reluctance, they have no reticence in instilling in them what they consider to be a healthy fear, whether of persons, animals, things, their own actions, or quite imaginary dangers. Older children likewise work on the younger. Nor are occasions for further instilling fear lacking. 'Always when they stay in the village, they go to the dancing-floor (*ocilā*) to play with the other children. During that time should something come to frighten them and make them run away, those who haven't younger siblings to carry are glad to get away quickly. But those who have younger siblings to carry see much hardship. They tire themselves terribly trying to carry their heavy young siblings and being unable to continue, they drag them, both of them crying and crying.' Nowadays, in case of need or simply tiring of their play, children may start off for the fields in search of mother, but formerly children were not allowed to venture unaccompanied outside the safety of the village palisades. The danger of kidnappers and of raiding parties was very real. One of the most vivid memories of the Rev. Paulino Ngonga's early child-

THE UMBUNDU BABY

95

hood was a day when he and an elder brother set off for the fields and almost ran into a party of raiders. The scolding which they received was not forgotten. 857 861

The practice of leaving the *ocisembe* in the village by day makes his elder sibling responsible for much of his education. This is the beginning of a close bond which lasts through life. She herself may not be more than six or seven years old and consequently cannot be expected to 'educate' her little charge very thoroughly. She interests herself in his walking and talking and he will imitate her in many things, but the rest of 'conscious education' must be attended to by the parents.

Cleanliness. Instruction in cleanliness begins at this age, but I fear that it is lacking either in intensity or in persistence for its effect seems to be rather long-delayed. Small babies are not washed very often but their bodies and heads are anointed with palm-oil against infestation with the various parasites of the tropics. Anointing the body continues to be a part of the toilet of the Ocimbundu through life. When palm-oil is scarce, such afflictions as common itch are more prevalent. Nowadays, in the well-appointed household, the *ocisembe* has his hands and face washed before breakfast. If such a connexion between washing and eating were always and everywhere maintained, habits of personal cleanliness might be more widespread. Brushing the teeth may be begun in imitation of mother. Sphincter training is begun very early, for the mother feels every muscular movement made or attempted by the baby on her back. Hence she is apt to know when it is necessary to take him down for defecation. If and when this procedure is followed through with regularity and persistence early sphincter control may be established, but too often this is not the case. Establishment of bladder control is apt to come even more uncertainly as a favourite proverb concerning the weather indicates: 863

Ilu lia soka ndetako lionqāñā.

The sky is like the bottom of a baby.

The Ovimbundu do not associate these bodily functions with shame to the extent which is the case in our culture, but euphemisms are used in place of the exact terminology.¹ If an

¹ There are prohibitions regarding these functions during visits to relatives-in-law with whom one has respect-relations, also to the bride during the wedding ceremonies. (See Folk-tales nos. 12 and 13 of the short collection in the *Journal* 606 514)

[538]

[p. 98]

CHAPTER VI CHILDHOOD

The Child (oneñe or omōlā¹)

857 (*From the achievement of physical independence until about nine years*)

866 'If a toddling child (*omōlā ocisembe*) has finished learning to walk and expects a younger sibling, he is not carried any more and even though his mother should go to (visit) another village, he will stay behind perfectly well without crying. Now he has changed a great deal: that which he formerly did, he now no longer does.' This statement is perhaps a little optimistic, but it may be taken as sufficiently realistic and representative for practical purposes.

The child continues to see the same adults and to play with the same children as before, i.e. those of his own home village, but with two differences which the narratives will bring out. *First*, he is not now dependent to such an extent upon the elder sibling or cousin, and this independence brings the beginning of his life-long association with his age-mates. *Second*, the sex division of society begins for him at this time. From about eight years of age boys and girls will play in sex groups, and boys will begin to eat in the *onjango* with their fathers, girls continuing in the kitchen with mother and the younger siblings. The child does not go beyond the sheltering friendliness of the village except in the company of adults until toward the middle of this period of childhood. With mother or father he may often go to the fields or on excursions to neighbouring villages or to the chief's village.

861 The conscious education of the child is very much intensified from the time he achieves independence, but parents rarely realize the importance of the years from about four until about eight when little boys begin eating in the *onjango*. Theoretically the balance between the male and female sides of the house, characteristic of Umbundu social structure, is maintained in the training and education of the children. Actually what generally happens is that, until about eight, the mother and the older sibling or cross-cousin are very largely responsible for whatever is given and after that the father becomes responsible for the boys while the mother continues with the girls. This arrangement is modified somewhat by

¹ *Omōlā* is the term generally used but its primary meaning is *son* or *daughter*.

- 862 "The practice of leaving the ocisembe in the village by day makes his elder sibling⁽¹⁾ responsible for much of his education.... She herself may not be more than six or seven years old and consequently cannot be expected to 'educate' her charge very thoroughly. She interests herself in his walking and talking and he will imitate her in many things."⁽²⁾
- 863 General instruction in cleanliness begins at this age, although sphincter control may have begun much earlier, since the mother feels every movement made by the baby on her back.

- 145 After weaning the physical development of the child proceeds more slowly than that of European peoples, and Childs believes that this may be due to deficiencies in diet.⁽³⁾

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

- 857 From the time a child is able to walk until he is about nine years old he continues seeing the same people as before, but he becomes less dependent upon the elder sister or cousin who helped him, and begins his life-long association with his age-mates. The sex-division of society starts for him at this stage: from about eight years boys begin to eat in the *onjango* with their fathers, girls continuing in the kitchen with their mothers. After about eight years the father becomes largely responsible for the education of boys, the mother for that of girls. During this period the child's education may be summarised under three heads:

- 869 (a) *Psychological*, chiefly fear of real or imaginary dangers. This is imparted by mother, elder siblings, and perhaps by a grandmother; there is a tendency for the teaching of fear to be done by women.⁽⁴⁾
- 867 (b) *Social*, chiefly usages of etiquette and acquaintance with the kinship structure and its requirements. A child of about eight is supposed to know his social status and all the etiquette that pertains to it. In the *onjango* the hierarchy of age is observed, honoured guests and old men being served first, and so on all down the line. With the decline of the *onjango*, there has been a great decline in the teaching of etiquette and social usage, and this naturally affects boys rather than girls.
- 864 Little direct sex teaching is attempted, and adults are reticent in speaking of sexual matters in the presence of children. But since children live with their parents in one-roomed houses, it is inevitable that children should sometimes observe intercourse.
- 868 (c) *Training in skills*: Children are taught few definite skills before the age of eight or nine, but many of their games are in imitation of adult activities.

- 604 From the age of six or seven years children are usually sent to spend one or two years with the mother's brother. They may also be sent to the father's sister or brother for a period, and, in the case of girls, to the mother's mother. Formerly prominent families sent their children for a
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(1) Either a brother or sister may act as nurse.

(2) Childs, *op.cit.*, p.95. (3) *Ibid.*, p.97.

(4) Childs actually writes - 'the side of the basket' (p.100), but seems to be referring simply to female relatives.

time to the village of the paramount chief. These periods spent away from home continue into adolescence. Not only relatives, but also friends, blood-brothers and *vakuacisoko* (see below) exchange children in this way.

Later childhood

No definite time marks the transition from early to later childhood, but there are marked differences between the two stages. As soon as the child is physically able, he begins to assume a definite role in the community. Soon after a child gets his permanent teeth, a notch in the form of an inverted V is chipped between the two upper front incisors. Formerly the beginning of the period was marked for the boy by his first trip with a trading caravan; today a boy of this age may begin to work in the fields with his father, or begin to learn a trade, or be sent to school. A girl starts to learn field-work and housework.

Professions

A boy is expected to learn the profession or *ocipinduko* in which his father or his mother's brother is expert, and after that, should he wish to learn some other side-line profession, he may apprentice himself. All children, both boys and girls, are expected to learn to cultivate, but that is not counted as a profession. The principal *ovipinduko* (professions) listed by Childs are: for girls, basket-making, pottery-making, medical practice and divination; for boys, mat-making, wood-working, rope-making, thatching, fishing, apiculture, hunting, smithing, and medical practice and divination. The last three, as has been mentioned above, are "sacred" and entered under special conditions.

"Later childhood, then, is the period of technical training during which it is expected that a large amount of economic responsibility will be assumed. A child begins to own property even before this, and from the beginning of childhood will be accounted legally responsible for his actions. It is recognised, however, that he should not be set tasks beyond the experience or ability of his age and that the full responsibility of adulthood will come only with marriage."⁽¹⁾

The coming of European commerce, industry, and government has created new types of employment for boys and men, some of which cause a prolonged absence from the village and a loosening or severing of kinship ties. There are no estimates of the number of persons employed by Europeans, or the average length of their absence from home.

ADOLESCENCE (2)

Childs found that the onset of puberty was late among the Ovimbundu, coming between fourteen and sixteen years for girls and between fifteen and seventeen years for boys. Soon after puberty young people generally stop sleeping in the parents' house. The girls congregate in kitchens and each boy builds himself a house, in which he will live through adolescence

(1) Childs, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

(2) Based on Childs, *op.cit.*, pp. 58-9 and 111-12.

ECONOMIC LIFE

169

When the clay was being mixed an old pot was broken and pulverized so that some of the powder might be added to the new pot. There may be the underlying idea of continuity in the potter's art. The potters said, *Sanga yi pita* ("Lest it leak"). There may be no purpose other than the imparting of stability to the new clay. 323

I was unable to find any trace of ritual except with reference to the opening of a new clay pit. When a pit is first opened both men and women attend. The head of a chicken is twisted off by a medicine-man, then the bird is held over the pit by either a man or a woman. There is no law or ceremony to determine who shall take the first clay from the pit. The art of making pots is in the hands of female specialists so far as the Ovimbundu are concerned. Observation makes clear that women will go for a long distance to obtain clay from the pit which has been opened in a ceremonial manner. On their way to such a pit they pass clay which would serve their purpose well, but they do not use it. Children sometimes amuse themselves by making animals of clay. [462] [782] [857]

The pottery of the Ovimbundu includes cooking vessels of many sizes, water containers, and very large pots for brewing beer (*olombia vi okukela*). [415]

MATS AND BASKETS

This occupation illustrates division of labor on a sex basis. Baskets are made by women, while mat-making is an occupation for males. As with other trades there is specialization. The majority of women are able to make baskets though the skill of individuals varies. All women who have a knowledge of basketry understand the manufacture of dyes. Only a few men make mats; my informant thought that perhaps one man in ten would have the necessary skill. Such specialization is continued into other occupations; for example, only a few men spin cotton thread, while the majority of people buy pottery from expert female potters. 462 285 [463]

The mat-maker, generally an elderly male, uses two tools, a borer and a needle, both products of the native forge. The borer (*utomo*) for piercing the reeds, consists of a long thin blade in a wooden grip. The needle (*osinja*) is threaded with bark fiber and passed through the holes made by the *utomo*. The bark thread is *ombanja* (plural *olombanja*). 285

The sleeping mat (*esisa*) is made of reeds which are gathered in the early morning by a man who wets and binds his material into bundles, each of which contains reeds of the same length. The length of the reeds varies, of course, with the size of mat he intends to make.

VII. EDUCATION

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND DIVISION OF LABOR

871 Usually there is no formality connected with the industrial and occupational training of Ovimbundu children. The section dealing with play shows that boys and girls learn by spontaneous imitation of their elders.

874 There are, however, exceptions to this general truth. Special rites connected with the training and inauguration of blacksmiths and hunters have been described. The training of medicine-men and women will be dealt with in chapter IX, "Religion."

462 In describing economic life in chapter V, division of labor on a
463 sex basis; also specialization in industry because of peculiar tastes and aptitudes, were noted. There is clearly a twofold division in industrial life. In the first place sex determines occupation, and within this primary grouping there is a secondary grouping depending on personal preference and individual ability. I have found no
[467] instance of exclusive hereditary right to any occupation or industry.

462 The net result of the Umbundu system of division of labor is indicated by the following summary:

[342] When building houses, men dig the rectangular trench, cut the poles for the framework, lash the crosspieces, cut grass and lay the thatch, then place clay over the wattle walls. Women carry water for mixing the clay and convey the moist clay to the plasterers.

[224] Children puddle the clay with their feet. Males are hunters both professional and general. During a communal hunt women and children assist in driving game, which is frightened by the firing of
[857] grass. Boys organize games in which they imitate these activities.

[226] Men fish with a line and bait, whereas women use baskets and
[231] narcotic poison. Men and boys take care of cattle and have charge of dogs. Women and girls give what slight attention is afforded to other domestic animals. Male specialists castrate bulls and goats.

[241] During agricultural operations men clear the ground and burn the bush. Women carry on hoe cultivation without assistance from

[482] men. Men are the chief carriers in caravans, but women and children may sometimes be seen carrying loads. They march in line with the men but have smaller burdens. Males are employed in blacksmith's work, wood-carving, making weapons and tools, weaving mats, dressing hides, spinning cotton, and formerly in weaving on an upright loom. Men are exclusively the makers of

KINSHIP

The rules about avoidance at night are still kept. The prohibitions on a man borrowing his father's clothes and sleeping in the same room as his father seem to survive. The prohibition on a child speaking the name of his father or mother reported by Childs is not, and was not formerly, found in this area. It is, however, wrong for a child to address his parents by name. 593

Children begin to work in the fields when they are about six. Occasionally boys of 10 to 11 go to the coffee fields for two months work, but usually boys do not go out to work until they are about 14 or 15. 551

A boy going out to work should ask his father's permission to go though this is not always done. Returning from work whether contract labour or voluntary work a boy should bring presents to his relatives. He would be expected to give something, say, a jacket, to his father, and a cloth to his mother, on returning from voluntary work and a shirt to his father on coming back from contract labour. These gifts should be made in kind. Money lent from son to father should be repaid, though it is wrong for a son to enforce payment by appealing to the post for policemen. A father may give money to his son for bride-wealth, and may suggest a choice of bride. He cannot constrain, nor could he in the past, his son and daughter to a marriage they do not wish. 593

A man cannot be said to have real authority over his grown sons. The stated norm is that a man's sons stay in the same village till he dies. He has no power to make them do so, and they are not condemned by public opinion if they live elsewhere. A man's attitude to classificatory 'fathers' is determined by the age, status, and personalities of those involved, rather than by jural rights and obligations. I have found men unable to tell me what had become of their own brothers' children. 604

Formerly when the father of an adolescent boy died he would join the household of a father's brother. Nowadays this would be much less likely, as it is common for such a boy to settle with other categories of kin, notably siblings and maternal kinsfolk. A man is free to stay with his brothers if he wishes, or to leave them. 768

While the tie between full brothers is held to be the strongest, as regards classificatory brothers there seems to be a slight 602